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HOMEMAKERS' CHAT

TUESDAY, JUNE 25, 1940

Subject: "INSECT QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS." Information from the Bureau of Entomology and Plant Quarantine, United States Department of Agriculture.

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Out of the mailbag this week come swarms of questions about insects.

The first letter reports another clothes moth-mystery. (Of all the insects housewives have to deal with, none seems to be more baffling than the clothes moth.) Let me read you this letter. It says: "Early this spring I sent out some heavy coats and blankets to be dry-cleaned, and then I packed them carefully away in a tight chest. I am certain no moths or moth eggs were in the clothes or in the chest. And the chest is too tight to let a moth in. Yet the other day when I opened the chest, I found moth holes in some of the clothes. How could this have happened?"

Probably the explanation is this: A flying moth hunting a place to lay her eggs found the chest of woolens but couldn't get in herself. So she laid her eggs in the crack of the chest so the young moths would be as near as possible to a plentiful supply of food. A few days later the larvae hatched; they were small enough to get through the crack and into the chest.

An entomologist of the Department of Agriculture recently discovered that newly hatched larvae of the clothes moth can get through a crack no larger than four-thousandths of an inch. So you'll be wise to seal all cracks with gummed tape after you have put your clothes away. And for extra precaution put a good supply of moth flakes in among the clothes.

Now here's a letter about another kind of household pest. A housewife writes: "I am terrified of an ugly-looking insect I often find in the basement and



first floor of our house. It is about an inch long, has a body like a grey worm, but on either side of the body has so many legs they look like a fringe. This insect goes lickety-cut across the floor--as fast as I've ever seen any insect run. Please tell me what it is, whether it is poisonous, and how I can get rid of it, short of moving out of the house."

The creature you describe is probably a house centipede. These small centipedes thrive in damp places such as basements, and often get up on the first floor.

You needn't be "terrified" of this small centipede because the entomologists say it never deliberately bites man. Its jaws are so weak they can hardly penetrate the skin. Only on the rarest occasions does it bite and the bites, though somewhat painful, are not serious. House centipedes are helpful insects because they feed on cockroaches, flies, moths, spiders, and other small insect pests.

But getting rid of centipedes is not a simple matter. Sprays and powders aren't effective because you don't know where to apply them; centipedes may be here, there, or anywhere. But you can cut down the number of centipedes in your house by getting rid of their hiding places, outside and in. Keep grass around the house well cut, and remove piles of rubbish, stones or boards. Fill in cracks in the house foundation. Screen all doors and windows. Remove stored articles from the cellar as much as possible, and kill centipedes as you come on them in the house.

Finally, if you want more information about centipedes or those other many-legged creatures, the millipedes, you are welcome to a leaflet telling all about them. This leaflet is prepared by Dr. E. A. Back of the U. S. Department of Agriculture. The leaflet is called "Centipedes and Millipedes in the House." It is No. 192. And a copy is free to anyone interested as long as the free supply holds out. Just write to the U. S. Department of Agriculture, Washington, D. C., asking for Leaflet 192, "Centipedes and Millipedes in the House."



Now here is a letter reporting insect trouble, not in a house but in a bird house. A lady writes that each spring when wrens start to build in the little house she has put up for them, wasps get in and drive the birds out. She wants to know how to keep wasps out of her bird houses.

That's another question rather difficult to answer. The entomologists haven't found any sure way to keep wasps out of bird houses. But they say if you paint or spray the inside of the house with creosote or anthracene oil, the wasps won't find it so attractive. If you spray this summer, the creosote or oil won't be too strong for the birds by nesting season next spring, but the wasps still won't enjoy it.

Finally, if you have quite a number of bird houses in your trees, birds driven out of one house by wasps can move to another.

That finishes the questions for today. More will be coming in on Thursday.

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